

Main Street Dental Care

September 15, 2016

Senator Mike Shirkey, Chairman
Health Policy Committee
Michigan State Senate
Lansing, Michigan 48909

Dear Chairman Shirkey and Members of the Senate Health Policy Committee:

As a dentist, I write to share my experiences of hiring and employing dental therapists in Minnesota, and urge you to support SB 1013.

I was the first private employer of dental therapists in the nation. My dental practice is located in Montevideo, Minnesota, a town of roughly 5,000 people in the rural western part of the state, about two and a half hours away from Minneapolis, and similar distances from Fargo, North Dakota and Sioux Falls, South Dakota. I hired my first dental therapist in early 2012; she previously worked as a dental assistant in my practice before going back to school to become a dental therapist. In preparation for bringing her back to my practice as a dental therapist, I sent out educational materials to members of my community to inform them of what she could do and how she would be integrated into the dental team at my office.

Over the first three years of employing a dental therapist, my practice's schedule filled up and our patient base grew so much that patients had to be scheduled six months in advance for restorative appointments. We were so busy that I made the decision to expand our practice in late 2014, hiring a second dental therapist and moving from a five operator practice to a practice with nine operatories. However, our schedule became overbooked again, and patients were still scheduled three to four months in advance. This led me to hire a third dental therapist in August 2015. And finally, just two months ago, I hired a fourth dental therapist.

We now are able to see many more patients, including many more patients on Medicaid, who previously did not have access to regular dental care. My practice has also experienced significant increases in revenues. Comparing the first year we hired a dental therapist (2012) to this year (2016) we have already increased production by \$776,572 and collections by \$488,778.

It's important to note that the dental therapists I employ provide extremely high quality care to the patients we serve. As a dentist for 38 years, I would not allow another provider in my office to perform fillings and extractions of teeth if I were not completely confident they could do so as well if not better than I can. I am proud to say all of my dental therapists are exceptional providers and receive high patient satisfaction from our new and existing patients.

John T. Powers D.D.S.

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Dental therapy is a great option for dentists who are trying to meet the oral health challenges in their communities, especially in rural and remote areas where few dentists are interested in working. It also makes financial and economic sense for individual private practice dentists, who otherwise have trouble affording to care for patients on Medicaid, due to low reimbursement rates and the high cost of care.

Dental therapy doesn't just help dentists, it also helps create jobs in rural areas like mine that are often in need of economic development. With more dental therapists on staff and more patients in our community seeking dental care, I have needed to significantly expand the size of my staff. Just a few years ago, in 2012, my practice had eight total employees. Now, I employ 20 people, including seven dental assistants, three dental hygienists, and four dental therapists (one part-time and three full-time), as well as support and administrative staff. We've created 12 new jobs for our community in one dental office, in just the last four years.

I strongly recommend allowing dentists in Michigan to have the same opportunity to grow their practices with dental therapists.

Thank you for your attention to this issue. Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,



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